

Arts & Entertainment
Arts in S.A. a work in progress
Cultural Collaborative intends to form a plan.

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What's the state of the arts in San Antonio?

Good question. An attempt to craft an answer is now under way, in the form of an arts planning process that the city's Office of **Cultural** Affairs calls the **Cultural Collaborative**.

Some in the arts community have their doubts about the value of the **Cultural Collaborative**, which is supposed to produce a report this fall after months of focus groups and interviews. But if the process is well-managed (by a consultant experienced in guiding **cultural** plans for cities across the country), it could provide the first comprehensive assessment of San Antonio's strengths and shortcomings in arts programming, facilities, audience and funding.

An unusual wrinkle in the local process is its emphasis on the arts as a potential contributor to economic development and neighborhood revitalization.

Some of the likely findings are obvious. Major producing institutions are few, inadequately supported and, sometimes, poorly served by their boards of trustees. State-of-the-art performing venues are nearly nonexistent, and some seriously compromised venues are too expensive for most arts organizations. The city has an excellent talent pool and a good deal of creative energy, but too often these assets are not effectively mobilized or marketed.

While we're waiting for the **cultural** plan, we're also waiting for a united arts fund, proposed last year by County Judge Nelson Wolff, to get off the ground. Wolff had hoped, too optimistically, for a spring 2004 launch of a payroll-deduction program modeled on United Way. Maybe next year.

More waiting: At last report the Museo Americano, a Smithsonian affiliate dedicated to documenting the Latino experience in exhibits and performances, was hoping for a soft opening next May. The full renovation and reopening of the art moderne Alameda Theater as a live venue remains a more distant prospect. Both are projects of Centro Alameda. The McNay Art Museum revealed a conceptual design this year for a new wing by French architect Jean-Paul Viguier, but no timetable for building it.

Two important venues completed extensive improvements this year. The Carver Community **Cultural** Center's excellent series of touring dance and music troupes expands this season with the reopening of the Carver's main theater. Jump-Start Performance Co.'s space in Blue Star has been made more comfortable and functional.

And the San Antonio Symphony returns to life in September after a silent season and Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Will the orchestra stay alive through this season and into the next? We'll just have to wait for the answer.

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